Enhancing Student Engagement in Teaching and Learning, a Case of Botho University

Kanos Matyokurehwa
Lecturer at Botho University, Gaborone, Botswana

Abstract: *The paper examined the factors that influence student engagement at a tertiary education in Botswana. The aim of the study was to enhance student engagement in teaching and learning. The research used a quantitative approach focusing on the case study of Botho University and a questionnaire was administered. A random sampling of tutors teaching first year up to fourth year students was employed. The questionnaire used a Likert scale to get participants opinions on the factors that enhance student engagement. Recommendations were made that would significantly enhance student engagement in teaching and learning.*
Keywords: *Student engagement, Teaching and learning, Enhance*

I. Introduction

Student engagement has been a topic that has been researched a lot by academics in order to come up with ways of enhancing student teaching and learning in the classroom. Hargreaves (2004) argues that teachers should come up with appropriate pedagogy to assist learners to increase their capacity to learn. Engaging a learner has become critical to achieve academic achievement as learners will be given feedback on their performance regularly by their teachers (Kuh, 2003).

Teachers need to actively engage the learners during and outside the classroom using virtual learning management systems so that learning can be extended beyond the classroom setup. The whole process of student engagement is for teachers to relate well with learners as they lead them in the path of self-discovery rather than treating learners like objects (Freire, 1972).

Various authors have different definitions on student engagement, Schunk and Meece (1992) defined student engagement as the willingness of the student to participate in the learning cycle while Schlecty (1994) defined the student engagement as the willingness of the students to engage in school activities like coming to classes regularly and submitting assignments on time. In this paper the student engagement is defined as the measure of academic success exhibited by the students over a specified period of time with the help of a teacher using the appropriate pedagogy.

Research objectives
1. To examine factors that influence student engagement at Botho University
2. To find out the challenges faced in engaging students at Botho University
3. To examine the level of utilization of educational technology tools by Botho University tutors.

Research questions
1. What are the challenges faced in engaging students doing Computing programme at Botho University?
2. Does the Institution provide students with relevant educational technologies?
3. What are the factors that influence student engagement?
4. What is the level of utilization of educational technologies by tutors at Botho University?

II. Literature Review

According to Friesen (2008) many authors have placed measurements on student engagement based on quantitative data like the students attendance, exam marks, the number of graduated students but not on the student engagement in terms of learning like are the students interested in the subject being taught, do students have time to do tasks given to them and their enjoyment in the learning process. The student engagement is a topic that many researchers are redoing the searches that have been done (re-search) before to come up with new ideas to the body of knowledge. Students who are not engaged will cause more damage to the reputation of the institution but the biggest challenge to educators is to engage the dis-engaged students (Prensky, 2001).

According to Prensky(2005) and Gilbert(2007) if an institution fails to change its pedagogy, its curriculum and the way they structure their assessments it simply means the institution failed the students and the students' future is bleak. Curriculum should be aligned to the needs of the students so that students can also be engaged in their studies; this can be achieved by coming up with subjects that are relevant and applicable to the students in this generation. Students in this generation are different from students in other generations

because they are technologically informed, so with that in mind teachers need to utilize educational technologies to engage the students.Students have shifted from the vertical classrooms to the horizontal ones where students are actively involved in the learning cycle; they view themselves as agents for academic change where they set targets for themselves and derive satisfaction in achieving the set targets.

Student engagement also happens when there is a teacher and student relationship that supports the students' challenges in the academic arena (Dunleavy and Milton, 2009). The teacher will be taking the role of a parent to advise the student on what they should do for them to succeed in their studies. Institutions like Botho University introduced the concept of academic advising so that students will feel loved and appreciated in their studies and by so doing they are engaged very well in their studies.

Students will be engaged if the work they are doing is very relevant or applicable to their day to day lives (Willms, 2003). So it is crucial to come up with relevant material to be given to students. The teacher could give students work that requires some deep thinking and a task that require the student to discuss with other students and share views and opinions.

For effective student engagement to take place the institution of higher learning should have a "rich learning environment" where enough computers will be available with a reasonable student computer ratio, computers with access to the internet and other learning management systems to facilitate independent learning for students (Barak, Waks, &Doppelt, 2000). The institution should play its part in equipping classrooms with computers and all other necessary accessories to provide a good learning environment to students. Botho University provided each and every student with a Tablet which makes independent learning a reality for students and teachers are provided with a laptop which makes the content preparation and delivery easy if well managed.

III.   Methodology

The research used a quantitative research approach to get data from participants with the use of a questionnaire which was given to tutors. The research was confined to a case study of Botho University tutors who are teaching different Computing modules from first year to fourth year. The target population was Botho University tutors in the Faculty of Computing with a total number of 82 tutors and the sample size consisted of 5 tutors teaching first year, second year, third year and fourth year modules.A random sampling technique of participants was implemented and 20 tutors were selected. A questionnaire was prepared and sent to the participants. The questionnaire consisted of three sections, the first section consisted of direct questions and the second section used a ranking scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree while the last section consisted of open ended questions.The questionnaire was pilot tested to 4 tutors for content validity and their opinions were incorporated into the questionnaire. SPSS was used to analyze the data collected from the participants.

IV.   Data Analysis And Results

A total of 17 participants filled and returned the questionnaire while three participants cited time constraints to complete the questionnaire and this translates to a staggering 85% of responses. 4 tutors taught first years, 3 tutors taught second years, 5 tutors taught third years and 5 tutors taught fourth years. A total of 14 participants alluded to the fact that the institution provides students with relevant educational technology platforms. The mean pass rate of students from the participants came up to 69%.The pass rate is not very pleasing but this can slightly improve if students are properly engaged in their studies to around 80%. Some of the challenges cited in engaging students that appeared more frequently from the responses included the following; students not reading on their own; students missing classes regularly; students taking much of their times on social media during classes on their Tablets; internet bandwidth slow to use educational technologies to the maximum;

The above challenges some of them can be rectified if students are properly engaged like students missing classes this can be reduced by the teacher making the subject interesting to the students and they will not afford to miss classes. Students taking too much time on social media can be reduced by uploading material on educational sites and ask students to discuss the materials in class and award marks based on their discussions. Bandwidth is an African problem and that will take time for the problem to disappear in our academic area but however the problems can be minimized by blocking certain social sites so that they are not accessible during working hours and dedicate the limited bandwidth to educational sites that can facilitate leaning.

The mean and the standard deviation were used to check the factors that influenced student engagement. The responses from participants varied from strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Agree. Weights were assigned to the responses starting from strongly agree with a weight of 1 up to strongly agree with a weight of 5. The weighs were summed up and divided by 5and a criterion mean of 3 was selected as the acceptable responses to be kept while means less than 3 were rejected.
The table below shows the factors that influence student engagement using the Likert scale from 1 to 5.

Table 1: Factors influencing student engagement

Influence factor	Mean	Standard deviation
Teaching the content to make it more interesting to students	3.53	1.1
Providing timely constructive feedback to students	4.22	0.9
Developing a good academic relationship with students	3.48	0.8
Using different teaching approaches when teaching	3.99	1.2
Students taking responsibility for their own learning	2.89	1.1
Teachers showing enthusiasm with the subject being taught	2.65	0.7

From the table above teaching the content to make it more interesting to students had a slightly high sample mean value of 3.53 and Standard deviation of 1.1. This means that a number of responses concurred that teachers should teach the content to make it more interesting to students as a way of engaging the students. The standard deviation is slightly higher meaning that responses were partially polarized. Providing timely constructive feedback to students had a high sample mean value of 4.22 which means that many responses concurred with providing timely feedback to students to improve the student engagement and the responses were very concentrated to the mean as can be seen with a standard deviation of 0.9.

Using different teaching approaches when teaching had a slightly high mean value of 3.99 which points out that using different teaching approach is good in order to engage the students. The standard deviation of 1.2 is high this shows that responses were scattered away from the mean, which can point out that responses were diverse on this question. Students taking responsibility for their own learning had a slight low mean value of 2.89 which points out that this can be used to engage the students but will not fully engage them as attested by the responses. The response was rejected as it fell below the criterion mean of 3. The standard deviation of 1.1 was high suggesting that the responses were not concentrated on the mean and diverse responses were given.

Teachers showing enthusiasm with the subject being taught had a slight low mean value of 2.65. The response was rejected as it fell below the criterion mean of 3 while the standard deviation was 0.7 which means all the responses were slightly concentrated on the mean value.

V. Conclusion

Student engagement is a topic with a variety of engagement factors that can be applied depending on the environment one will be operating in. For effective student engagement to take place the institution should provide a good learning environment for both teachers and students so that the necessary accessories will be available when needed by both parties. Teachers and students can work together to improve the engagement. The above findings suggested that providing timely and constructive feedback can help in improving student engagement. Teaching the content to make it more interesting to students can also help in improving the student engagement. Teachers showing enthusiasm with the subject being taught and students taking responsibility for their own learning can marginally improve student engagement at institutions of higher learning.

VI. Recommendations

From the results obtained, the institution provided the students with relevant educational technology to facilitate learning but however the teachers need to use those platforms to engage the students effectively. Although the mean pass rate was pegged at 69% this can be improved significantly if the factors that influence student engagement are put into practice by the teachers and students.

Teachers need teach the content effectively and make it more interesting to students, with this in mind the students will love the subject and they get engaged. The teachers need to give relevant examples in classroom, the teacher needs to be open to the students and willing to assist if the students find the content difficult to understand if need be coming up with extra lessons to cater for slow learners.

Providing timely constructive feedback to students is critical to engage the students because learners would want to get constructive feedback on their work timely. If the student did not do well, the teacher needs to motivate the student and the student will feel energized to do better in the next assignment and with that in mind the student will be engaged in their studies in order to improve their grades and ultimately their academic performance will improve.

Developing a good academic relationship with students is crucial to engage the students. A student who is never appreciated with the teacher will not do well in their studies. Teachers should learn to develop good academic relationships with students to boost their morale and the student engagement will be improved. Using different teaching approaches when teaching is critical to achieve student engagement, if different approaches are adopted the subject will be interesting to the students and this creates an engagement.

References

[1]. Barak, M., Waks, S., &Doppelt, Y. (2000). Majoring in technology studies at high school and Canadian Education Association (CEA), 1-22 Development (OECD). Accessed May 2016 from http://www.unb.ca/crisp/pdf/0306.pdf

[2]. Dunleavy, J. & Milton, P. (2009). What did you do in school today? Exploring the concept of fostering learning. Learning Environment Research, 3, 135–158.

[3]. Freire, P. (1972). Education: domestication or liberation?. Prospects, 2(2), pp.173-181.

[4]. Friesen, S. (2008). Effective teaching practices – A framework. Toronto: Canadian Education

[5]. Gilbert, J. (2007). Catching the Knowledge Wave: Redefining knowledge for the post-industrial

[6]. Hargreaves, D. H. (2004). Learning for Life: the Foundations for Lifelong Learning. Bristol: Policy Press.

[7]. Kuh, G.D. (2003). What we're learning about student engagement from NSSE. Change, 35(2), 24-32.

[8]. Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. On the Horizon, 9(5), 1–6.

[9]. Prensky, M. (2005). Engage me or enrage me. EDUCASE Review, 40(5), 61–64. Results from PISA 2000. Paris: Organization for Economic Co-operation and

[10]. Schlecty, P. (1994). "Increasing Student Engagement." Missouri Leadership Academy. p. 5.

[11]. Schunk, D. and Meece, J. (1992) Student Perceptions in the Classroom. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. p. 27 Student Engagement and its implications for Teaching and Learning in Canada. Toronto:

[12]. Willms, J. D. (2003). Student Engagement at School: A Sense of Belonging and Participation. age. Education Canada, 47(3), 4-8. Canadian Education Association.www.cea-ace.ca Association.